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AUTHOR Dale, Helen
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ABSTRACT

This paper examines a four-way conference involving a student teacher in high school English, the cooperating teacher, a generalist student teaching supervisor, and an English specialist supervisor. The paper reflects on the interactions in the conference and the impact of having two supervisors with differing priorities for discussion. The student teacher, who was in the process of "reframing" her image of herself as a teacher rather than a student, had the opportunity to hear together the points of view of those who had played a principal role in her education as a teacher. The student teacher was required to integrate ideas, processes, and values learned in separate contexts, which encouraged reflectivity and facilitated learning. In receiving feedback from three distinct sources, the student teacher could verify her own view of herself as a teacher in diverse ways. She responded to each of the other conference participants differently, incorporating their languages and their values. The two supervisors also gained understanding from the four-way conference, as they discovered that although they represented different fields, both valued inquiry-oriented supervision. (Contains 25 references.) (JDD)

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Four-Way Supervision: Weaving the Voices, Unweaving the Strands

Helen Dale

English Department
University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire
Eau Claire, WI 54702-4004

DALEHN@CNSVAX.UWEC.EDU

(715) 836-4540 or 836-2639

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In the literature about supervisory conferences (e.g. Acheson & Gall, 1987; Garman, 1986; Glickman, 1985; Smyth, 1988), the established norm projects a three-way conference involving the student teacher, the cooperating teacher, and the university supervisor (e.g. Glickman & Bey, 1990; Grimmett & Ratzlaff, 1986; Guyton & McIntyre, 1990). An even more optimum supervisory situation in a secondary setting would involve a representative of the School of Education and another from the content area, but that rarely happens. Even though the institution with which I am affiliated requires both generalist and content specialist supervisors to visit secondary student teachers, the university representatives do not make joint visits. However, a colleague and I wanted to experiment with four-way conferences in supervising Gina, a former student now student teaching in a small town high school English classroom in the Midwest. We wanted to capitalize on our different perspectives--he a generalist and I an English specialist--and still maintain the input of the cooperating teacher. While we knew our diverse perspectives would create different assumptions and expectations, those disciplinary differences also had the potential to create a rich and complex understanding (Crowe, Levine, & Nager, 1992).

This paper is a "fine grained" look (Waite, 1993, p. 676) at a four-way conference which took place in May of 1993 in order to understand the impact of having two university supervisors present. Convergence rather than divergence of attitudes is difficult to

achieve in a supervisory conference, but such convergence can be fostered by recognizing the complexity of student teaching (Guyton & McIntyre, 1990), and a four-way conference keeps the focus on the complexity of the situation. While our values about supervision converged, our priorities for discussion varied, in part because we represent different fields. Through paying attention to the interactions between participants with diverse perspectives, we may come to understand the process of becoming reflective practitioners.

The student teacher is not the sole focus here, for each of us involved in this small study learned from the others. The very process of transcribing and analyzing the protocols promoted reflection and learning. Although the four-way conference promoted reflection, growth, and change, the point is less to "sell" the idea of a four-way conference than to reflect on the interactions in this specific conference and the impact of having two supervisors.

REFRAMING

In this conference Gina needed to fulfill our expectations since she was still keenly aware of being "just" a student teacher. Near the end of her student teaching experience, Gina was in the process of "reframing" (Schon, 1983)--seeing herself as a teacher rather than a student. Although Gina had been a student for the

last seventeen years, she had envisioned herself as a teacher from an early age. "When we would play games...I would be teacher. It's true." She decided definitely on teaching as a career in high school and not only declared education as a major, but also tutored at the university. A teacher's voice had been in her repertoire for some time. Still, in the supervisory conference, she vacillated between being a student and being a teacher. Within the same minute of conversation, Gina adopted both stances. She thinks of herself as a "student teacher, and I know that I'm not a real teacher." And although Ella gave her free rein in her classes, Gina does not feel "a sense of ownership." However, within a few conversational turns she indicates she *does* feel like a real teacher, one who "still can learn." "Making it my own" was an important goal for Gina as she observed teachers and classrooms.

The four-way conference focused and intensified the reframing process by literally bringing together important recent influences on Gina's professional persona: her cooperating teacher, methods teacher, and English methods teacher. One of our implicit goals in this semester-end conference was to reinforce Gina's image of herself as a competent and reflective teacher. Because of the confluence of forces, she could get confirmation from discrete sources and synthesize them. One case in point occurred when Gina explicitly discussed the value she placed on our feedback about the lesson. In the transcript segment that follows G[ina] is the student teacher, M[ike] is the general university supervisor, and H[elen] is the English content specialist.

M: You wanted some feedback from us about the lesson. What does that tell you? Because I think you've gotten some from each of us.

G: Well, the reason I want feedback is so I can.... I mean... I'm a student teacher. Um... I want to know what I'm doing right so I can continue doing that right and want to know about not so good so that I can improve.

M: Did we adequately make any of those right and not so good distinctions?

G: Um. I think you boosted my confidence a little in that it's helpful for me to know that you do see a difference. Um. Because it's harder for me to. And that makes me feel more confident.

M: But we didn't do much categorizing; that was right and this was something to do better.

G: Well, you showed me, um, also what impressed you.

M: Why?

G: (unclear) reinforcing what I'm doing.

H: What if what I found real admirable, Mike didn't? That... you know that those things are entirely possible with two supervisors from...you know, two different perspectives.

G: Well, then I'd know that they are two different perspectives.

H: But that too, doesn't that blur the idea of

G: Yeah, I suppose.

H: good and bad, right and wrong?

M: And so I'm wondering on that basis if something impressed us

G: But then I still evaluate what both of you say and what Ella says and what reaction I got from the students. So I can weigh the parts.

M: That's the critical part. So something that impressed us, you might not do again. We won't be here to be impressed again.

H: Yeah, does it feel right to you? You don't have to lug us all around, starting very soon. [laughter] You can decide whatever you want to internally, right? You know, then it's your choice. So, I think that is the point, certainly, that Mike is making.

In this exchange Gina has had to verbalize how she would process conflicting messages in our feedback, a process that four-way conferencing promotes.

While all student teachers must at some time have to process alternative or even conflicting views about teaching and learning, Gina had the opportunity to hear together the points of view of those who had played a principal role in her education as a teacher. At least on some points, she could predict and verify our individual viewpoints and examine whether those viewpoints converged or diverged. Within that framework she can place and relocate herself. What is usually internalized conversation in her own synthesis of influences became an externalized conversation,

available for analysis and understanding. An interesting aspect of this exchange is that Gina responds both as a student and as a teacher. Her growth in seeing herself as a teacher is particularly apparent when she says that if she received conflicting messages from us, she would go beyond our perspectives to also take into account "what reaction I got from the students," certainly a teacherly thought.

WEAVING THE VOICES

In this conference we can trace some influences on Gina as a teacher. We literally hear the contributing voices from their original sources and can also "hear" them once-removed in the student teacher's externalized thinking. Integrating theory and practice encourages reflection (Hill, 1986), and Gina had to integrate ideas, processes, and values learned in separate contexts. By promoting such integration, the four-way conference is especially effective. It encourages reflectivity by promoting productive cognitive conflict which has been shown to facilitate learning (Brown & Palinscar, 1989; Johnson & Johnson, 1979; Mugny & Doise, 1978). Separate perspectives must be weighed against each other and applied in a situated context.

Because new teachers must constantly make discourse choices in the process of acculturation, and because Gina was literally surrounded by those who had most recently helped her to shape and

articulate her ideas about teaching, we hear divergent voices in her own. We need a lens through which to view the language of a student teacher reframing herself as a professional, a lens to help us understand the nascent teacher. Mikhail Bakhtin, a Russian language theorist, provides one such lens. For Bakhtin, language represents a unique conception of the world where each word we use resonates with other's voices. "Each word tastes of the...contexts in which it has lived..." (1981, p. 293). Gina views herself as both teacher and student. Naturally her voice reflects her unique situation. Bakhtin (1986) points out that voice is always a reflection of a particular social situation, not merely a reflection of personality. In analyzing Gina's speech, I am interested in the critical Bakhtinian question: "Who is doing the talking?" In whose voice does Gina speak?

Gina wants to be a professional and is willing to take control. She starts the conference, "OK, do you want me to lead this discussion?" But in the next breath she says, "Well, I guess I really want to know your comments." It is this tension between being a teacher and yet a student that runs throughout this four-way conference. It is the interplay of the student and teacher roles that is especially interesting. When she is asked a direct question Gina often responds in a student voice. At one point Helen refers to the teaching metaphor paper Gina had written for the English methods class and that paper's concern with classroom structure. Gina responds in a tentative way, phrasing statements in question-like intonations. "I think a teacher is a leader?

They do the structuring and the students are the ones that learn?" To Mike she frequently responds in a student voice. At one point he asks her about closure in her lesson. She responds, " Um, well, probably not much of a closure to the lesson because it will be continued tomorrow....They have this assignment and then [voice drops and becomes unclear] Maybe there were openings and closings throughout the period." It is as though she hopes to get some "credit" for attempts at closure. She stumbles like a student caught not knowing the answer when Mike asks whether what she has been teaching, such as wordiness, shows up in her students' writing. "OK. Um, I've noticed that they've had wordiness in some of their writing...um when they're burying what they mean. And in fact I've written comments on some of the research papers that, "This is wordy.'"

Of course, Gina *is* teacher as well as student. And it is when she speaks of students that she sounds like a teacher. When Gina refers to students trying to take advantage of her "softness," she says in her best teacher tone, "So you have to learn." and adds, "I mean kids are going to try to get away with something if they can." Often in her teacher voice she appropriates the generic voice of English Teacher to gain authority and credibility in a process Bakhtin (1981) calls *ventriloquation*: speaking through another voice to achieve a social end. When she is talking about literature discussions, she says that she tells students "If you have an argument, if you have a point to make, you have to back it up with evidence from the book." One can hear voices of English

teachers past who have trained English majors to value close reading of a text above all. Gina also cares deeply about student learning. "Students need... purpose; otherwise they become discouraged and frustrated." In her concern for students, she certainly adopts the voice and concerns of a teacher.

UNWEAVING THE STRANDS

Not only does Gina use student and teacher voices, but she responds to each of us in the four-way conference differently, incorporating our languages and our values. At the beginning of the conference Gina evaluates the lesson. "Well, I think it went okay. Um. I think I could have been more prepared for this in some ways." Our individual responses to her are very telling. We all try to make Gina feel all right about the lesson, but each in our own way. Helen, the English content supervisor, responds supportively and conversationally, "It never occurred to me that it was not a well prepared lesson. That doesn't mean that you might not do it differently the next time." Mike, the general methods supervisor, responds supportively as well, but more in the voice of authority. "I'd pipe in on that...that same sense of feedback, too. A lesson that is well prepared ought to feel spontaneous as you're departing from a lesson plan and modifying it on the spot and that should be a comfortable feeling." Ella, the cooperating teacher, responds by relating that feeling to day-to-day classroom

life. "But you also have to realize that you're going to have that experience in your first year of teaching that every lesson is going to feel that way no matter how much you prepared."

Even though each of us shifts voices over the course of the conference, Gina still responds to each of us according to the voices we set forth initially. She engages in "collaborative conversation" with Helen (Hollingsworth, 1992, p. 374), at times even interrupting her; she is more hesitant, as though trying to ascertain the right answer with Mike, and with Ella she discusses kids and the way things "really are." The variety of response modes in itself is a strong argument for four-way conferences. Gina can externalize the "voices of her mind" (Wertsch, 1991) by responding to us specifically. None of us alone could adequately have represented all three voices. Like all of us, Gina has been enriched by all the voices which have influenced her as a person and as a teacher. According to Bakhtin who you are is determined by "selectively assimilating the words of other" (1981, p. 341). In this four-way conference, the voices that will integrate for her later seem sorted into separate strands.

Her remarks to her English supervisor are different in content as well as tone than they are to the other two participants. Gina taught a lesson identifying and showing examples of four kinds of wordiness. Sensitive to the fact that Helen would value application over labeling, Gina says, "I do realize that the importance is in the actual identification and the writing of it." Later in the conference when Helen suggests that Gina might use

examples of wordiness from the students' own writing, Gina replies, "I have done that before. I employed that with active and passive voice. I have done that with parallelism." She is a bit defensive, and wants to let Helen know that she "gets" it. In fact, elsewhere in the protocol she explicitly says, "I got it." Still later she uses terms like "thesis statement" and "body paragraphs." She not only uses terms from the field of English, but also makes sure Helen is aware that she is making teaching decisions of which Helen would approve. "[T]heir final is going to be um an essay final and they're going to be able to choose one of three essays." This explanation is clearly geared to Helen's belief that to evaluate language one must give students the opportunity to engage in extended written responses.

With Mike, Gina responds differently. Her basic pattern is to answer him rather than converse with him, thus adopting a student stance. When she is discussing her "softness" with students, the following dialogue takes place.

Mike: What does that say about you and your role in teaching?

Gina: I'm consistent then.

Mike: OK

Gina: Maybe I'm always sensitive to students' needs. And every answer is worthwhile. Because they can learn from it either way

Mike: And that sensitivity

Gina: whether they're right or wrong.

Mike: Excuse me. And that sensitivity has been something consistent because we've noted it and talked about it throughout the semester, so there's a consistency in that sense, too. Not just within the lesson but across time.

[a few seconds elapse]

Gina: I'm not taking any notes.

That Gina suddenly feels she *should* be taking notes is a strong indicator since taking notes usually denotes student or subordinate status. Other examples also suggest a student role when Gina is focused on Mike in the supervisory discussion. Early in the conference, Mike asks Gina whether a teaching decision she made came spontaneously. She answers, "It didn't come spontaneously. I suppose it will come next time." Her attitude is a defensive one as though there were a right answer to the question, an answer that Mike as the authority figure would know. His response, "Would it? Should it? Does it matter?" reveals his original question as authentic, not the quiz question that Gina perceived.

When Gina does answer Mike in a teacher voice, she tends to back away from her assertions. At one point in the conference Mike asks, "What...what felt most like a teacher in today's lesson and what, if anything, felt least like a teacher to you?" Gina gives a series of answers. She says, "The interaction. The question/answer kind of thing." She elaborates on that answer and

concludes with "And I guess I feel like a teacher....because I can give them that immediate feedback. I think they're learning so much more. *I don't know if that makes sense*, but I guess that is true. I can tell that learning is happening." Her concerns for student learning and the value she places on giving feedback mark this response as a teacherly one. Yet Gina must still qualify her professional stance with Mike by saying, "I don't know if that makes sense." Certainly one possibility here is that gender relations are coming into play. Using qualifiers and hedges to show subordination is frequently cited as a female speech pattern (Lakoff, 1973). But even without a gendered interpretation, it is clear that Gina is not quite comfortable sounding like a teacher around Mike. Perhaps that is only natural since his role as a general supervisor is to take particular instances and generate broad generalizations which would be of use to a student teacher later. Gina reacts to such moves by responding to Mike as a student.

With Ella, Gina responds still differently. She talks to Ella as a fellow teacher, and Ella responds in kind although she also projects ahead for Gina. Ella is focused on Gina's success as a first year teacher and relates to her that way. In doing that, she grants Gina peer status. From the beginning when Gina is concerned about not feeling sufficiently prepared for the lesson, Ella focuses on the first year of teaching when "<u>every</u> lesson is going to feel that way no matter <u>how</u> much you prepared." She is the voice of reality.

Gina's comments to Ella are situated in the reality of day-to-day classroom interactions and grounded in their common knowledge of specific students. Ella and Gina can understand the challenge of a class that includes students with a wide range of backgrounds and abilities. They talk about the role of the guidance office in such classes, and Gina takes on a teacher voice in expressing the frustrations of a class that is supposed to have prerequisites, "but somehow they [unqualified students] slip through." Ella and Gina can share not only frustrations, but also the joy that comes with teaching well. When Ella is praising Gina for her new-found spontaneity, Gina replies "That's what makes it fun!"

When Ella and Gina speak in this four-way supervisory conference, the talk sometimes turns to students and from there to issues of classroom management and classroom events, a pattern typical of cooperating teacher/student teacher discourse (Glickman & Bey, 1990). When Gina discusses her earlier tentativeness and the ways in which students took advantage of that, she comments, "So you have to learn." It is precisely this sort of learning that Gina has gained from teaching in Ella's classroom and, in fact, it is Ella who responds to that statement and summarizes the results of being tentative with students. Ella turns the conversation to control. "[Y]ou've seemed like you really kind of had a rein on them, so that they never really got off task that much." Gina continues the subject of control by saying, "I mean kids are going to try to get away with something if they can." With Ella Gina feels a camaraderie and responds teacher to teacher. After all,

they face the same problems in the same context. If Ella takes on advisory status at all, it is around the issue of control and probably because classroom control can be a big challenge for a first year teacher. (Doyle,1986; Veenman, 1984).

CONCLUSION

In interpreting the voices woven into Gina's own, I had to ask, "What triggered these voices of student, teacher, colleague?" "Was it the questions we asked or the relationships we have had with her?" Certainly, her responses were triggered both by our questions and by our past relationships with her. She would know us by the issues we would raise and by our demeanor with her. In speaking of a novel Gina had taught, Their Eyes Were Watching God, Ella speaks as a fellow teacher, responding but not *asking* questions. Helen asks collegial questions. "How do you deal with that?" "How hard was it for them to deal with the dialect in the book?" "Would you teach it again?" Mike tends to generalize from the specific. "Do you have a clear sense in your mind of what you take as evidence?" His concern is that Gina be able to utilize present experience in the future. Each of us tends to maintain a consistent pattern with Gina. Our individual relationships with her seem to grow out of our questions, both those of the past and those of the moment.

While Gina has certainly been influenced by many people and

circumstances, it is important to indicate the extent to which her conceptions of herself as a teacher remained intact. Gina's metaphor for teaching English, written eight months before this supervisory conference, serves as a useful example of her loyalty to her own view of teaching and learning. She chose the metaphor of authorship. In that conception of teaching she stressed the importance of being an instructional leader and the teacher's role in developing students' understanding. But she emphasized even more her commitment to a very student-centered approach to learning. "[S]tudents should be the main focus." "[E]ach student is important." When I asked her in the conference if she would still choose the same metaphor, she replied, "I guess I would have to agree with it."

At that point, Mike interjected that he had heard a research report at AERA that proposed that teacher as a manager of instruction was one of three composite factors in describing effective teaching. He then asked Gina, "Do you feel like a manager of instruction?" "Would you embrace that as a metaphor?" Gina stumbled for a short time in responding to Mike. "Well, that's if you're talking about uh just the lesson and what is learned that day. Because there are other things that are involved, um, things that...aren't in the lesson plans. Um, there...Oh, I'm just trying to think of examples, but...the students interacting together." A few conversational turns later, she returned to her original metaphor of teacher as writer, "not only determining the content but the expression." Her resistance

to Mike's metaphor and her loyalty to her own are remarkable, especially if one keeps in mind the weight of Mike's invoking "research says" and her consistent response to Mike as a student to a teacher throughout this conference. This is a clear instance of the value of what Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, and Tarule (1986) refer to as "self-constructed knowledge" as opposed to "received knowledge." Because Gina had created her own metaphor for teaching, she could sustain her conception of herself as a teacher.

That very conception, however, is a synthesis of many other people and contexts. Bakhtin compares learning from others to a chemical union (1981). A chemical bond creates something new, yet the original elements are still there as part of the new substance. Through the voices embedded in Gina's own, it is clear that Gina has gained from the discourse of learning to teach as well as from its contexts. She has learned from past models, from her teacher education instructors, and from her student teaching experience. She remains her own person yet incorporates what is useful that she has learned from others. What she has known "in other people's contexts, serving other people's intentions" (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 293) she has made her own. What she has learned from others has entered "into interanimating relationships with new contexts" (p. 346).

Because others reflect who we are, we come to know our own voices best when in dialogue with others (Bakhtin, 1981; Bruner, 1990). Gina had an opportunity to understand her professional "looking-glass self" (Cooley, 1922) Through a four-way conference,

Gina could see herself reflected in multiple facets. In receiving feedback from three distinct sources, Gina could verify her own view of herself as a teacher in ways not possible without such a conference. Her reaction to feedback from diverse sources was positive. "[T]hat makes me feel more confident."

One other important function of the four-way supervisory conference is that through it we modeled collegiality and a pattern of lifelong learning and reflection about teaching. Individually, we found value in our experience with four-way supervision. Ella valued staying in touch with the university and with reflection on both the specific and general contexts of teaching. Mike valued the opportunity to mutually generate meaningful questions. He and I discovered that although we represented different fields, both of us valued inquiry-oriented supervision (Zeichner, 1983); we were more interested in *why* than in *how*. As a content specialist, I valued the continuity of ideas from the English methods class to the classroom and seeing connections between theory and practice. We were all interested in stimulating Gina's thinking and even more so in *hearing* Gina's thinking. And we were all invested in her success as a teacher. All of us found stimulating the discussion of classroom teaching with colleagues who teach in other contexts and in other fields. We were not there to provide solutions, but to gain insights from our interactions; our focus was on mutual understanding and growth rather than on analysis (Hollingsworth, 1992; Waite, 1993).

The four-way conference led to understandings that came from the inherent tensions that occur when those with four different points of view come together to discuss one specific and contextualized lesson. The more experiences one is exposed to, the larger one's repertoire of voices and contexts. The model set forth instantiates thoughtful approaches to teaching and values self-direction. Gina said it best herself at the end of the conference. "I don't feel limited in anything because I feel like I can always learn." The understandings were not just for Gina to glean; the four-way conference led to increased reflection about teaching and learning for all of us involved in her supervision.

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